

Members

Rep. Dennis Avery, Chairperson
Rep. Carolene Mays
Rep. David Cheatham
Rep. Thomas Knollman
Rep. Suzanne Crouch
Rep. Jackie Walorski
Sen. Vaneta Becker, Vice-Chairperson
Sen. John Waterman
Sen. Michael Delph
Sen. Connie Sipes
Sen. Glenn Howard
Sen. Timothy Skinner



INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON MISSING CHILDREN

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MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date: September 11, 2007
Meeting Time: 1:00 P.M.
Meeting Place: State House, 200 W. Washington St., Room 404
Meeting City: Indianapolis, Indiana
Meeting Number: 2

Members Present: Rep. Dennis Avery, Chairperson; Rep. Carolene Mays; Rep. David Cheatham; Rep. Thomas Knollman; Rep. Suzanne Crouch; Rep. Jackie Walorski; Sen. Vaneta Becker, Vice-Chairperson; Sen. John Waterman; Sen. Michael Delph; Sen. Timothy Skinner.

Members Absent: Sen. Glenn Howard; Sen. Connie Sipes.

Call to Order

Representative Dennis Avery, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 1:10 P.M. and the members of the Committee introduced themselves.

Michelle Clark, IUPUI

Michelle Clark introduced herself to the Committee and explained that she is an education advocate at IUPUI and she assists foster youth to achieve their academic goals.

¹ Exhibits and other materials referenced in these minutes can be inspected and copied in the Legislative Information Center in Room 230 of the State House in Indianapolis, Indiana. Requests for copies may be mailed to the Legislative Information Center, Legislative Services Agency, 200 West Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2789. A fee of \$0.15 per page and mailing costs will be charged for copies. These minutes are also available on the Internet at the General Assembly homepage. The URL address of the General Assembly homepage is <http://www.in.gov/legislative/>. No fee is charged for viewing, downloading, or printing minutes from the Internet.

Ms. Clark explained that most foster youth age out of foster care at 18 years of age and are left to take care of themselves with little or no support from anyone. Further, some foster youth age out of foster care having no job skills and are not able to maintain sufficient employment.

Ms. Clark also discussed that sibling relationships are extremely difficult for foster youth to maintain because foster youth are often in different foster families. Additionally, older siblings may not contact other siblings in foster care without parental permission. Ms. Clark also introduced Jessica to the Committee. Jessica is a former foster youth and explained to the Committee that she has several siblings in foster care, but cannot visit them because she does not get along with her mother. Jessica asked the Committee to consider proposing legislation to allow siblings to visit foster youth without parental permission.

Ms. Clark also suggested the following proposals for legislation:

- (1) Allow foster youth to remain in their home school by providing transportation and waiving district tuition.
- (2) Provide additional tutoring and mentoring for foster youth.

Rep. Walorski asked Ms. Clark if foster youth had access to CASA volunteers. Ms. Clark stated that CASA has a waiting list and there are not enough CASA volunteers to meet the demand.

Rep. Avery asked Jessica if she had applied for the 21st Century Scholars program. Jessica and Ms. Clark responded that the 21st Century Scholars program was not available to Jessica because she has a GED and did not graduate from high school.

Rep. Avery also requested that the Department of Child Services report to the Committee on their policies regarding sibling relationships of foster youth.

Paulette Moore, Wheeler Mission Care Center

Paulette Moore, the director of the Wheeler Mission Care Center, first discussed the following statistics with the Committee:

- On one night in 2006 in Indianapolis, there were 229 children in emergency shelters and 312 children in transitional shelters.
- The Salvation Army Family Shelter usually houses 182 families and 132 children.
- The Wheeler Mission Care Center currently houses 52 single mothers and 83 children.
- 60% of women in shelters have children and 65% of homeless mothers do not have custody of their children.

Ms. Moore stated that these statistics for Indianapolis mirror national statistics regarding the homeless population and there is not enough shelter space in Indianapolis for the homeless. Ms. Moore also stated that her program received 924 calls to shelter families in 2006 and they had to turn away 92% of the calls.

Ms. Moore also discussed that shelters cannot offer individuals under 18 years of age services without parental permission. Ms. Moore suggested that the Committee propose legislation to allow emancipated youth into shelters without parental approval.

Ms. Moore also stressed that homeless children suffer from the stigma of being homeless, they need tutoring and mentoring, and they often suffer from mental health issues that are never addressed.

Senator Delph asked Ms. Moore about the role of fathers with homeless youth and how churches can get involved with homeless families. Ms. Moore stated that her shelter does not offer shelter to homeless men and boys over 6 years of age, and most of the mothers in her shelter are not married. She also stated that churches support her ministry, but if all churches were involved in dealing with the homeless crisis, homelessness could be solved.

Kevin Moore & Jim Cox, Department of Correction

Kevin Moore, who is the director of juvenile services at the Department of Correction, told the Committee that there are 1010 youth in six facilities operated by the DOC. When the DOC releases a juvenile offender, the youth is released to parole, probation, an out of state program, a foster or group home, or is discharged. Every youth facility has a counselor who helps prepare offenders for release.

Jim Cox, the director of case management at the DOC, explained that many local community corrections programs exist that allow juvenile offenders to remain in their community and to be incarcerated for shorter periods of time. These programs include mentoring youth and parole agents counseling the family of juvenile offenders.

Rep. Walorski asked Mr. Moore if the DOC tracks how many juvenile offenders end up back in the DOC as adults. Mr. Moore stated that there is a 39.2% return rate.

Rep. Avery asked how the DOC was helping ex-offenders to not become homeless. Mr. Cox responded that the DOC has Bureau of Motor Vehicle satellite offices to provide identification cards for inmates and DOC has a program that provides housing for one year to former inmates.

Katie Martin and Judy Velasco, Valparaiso University

Katie Martin and Judy Velasco, two social work students at Valparaiso University, addressed the Committee regarding child homelessness policies, specifically the policies regarding aging out of foster care in Indiana and other states. An outline of the testimony was presented to the Committee (Exhibit 1). Ms. Martin and Ms. Velasco stated that 800 individuals age out of foster care each year in Indiana, and 100,000 age out of foster care nationally each year. Many of these individuals become homeless and often these individuals are not aware of programs that can help them avoid homelessness. Ms. Martin and Ms. Velasco also stated that Massachusetts has permanency plans for foster youth which assist foster youth by providing social connections and community resources. Ms. Martin and Ms. Velasco suggested that the Committee propose legislation to require caseworkers of foster children to present options that can assist foster children when they age out of foster care.

Bill Glick, Indiana Juvenile Justice Task Force

Bill Glick, the executive director of the Indiana Juvenile Justice Task Force (Task Force), first recommended that the Committee propose legislation to study the true nature of homelessness and to determine the number homeless in Indiana. Mr. Glick stated that the last time a comprehensive study of homelessness in Indiana took place was in the 1980s.

Mr. Glick next explained that homeless youth do not just involve foster youth and the problems with homeless youth are not limited to children in poverty or children who live in urban areas. The Task Force provides shelter for homeless youth in rural communities, through the Host Homes program, in Clay County, Dearborn County, Johnson County, Well County, and Morgan County. Host Homes began in the 1980s and is primarily funded by federal money. In each county that has a program there is a local coordinator who acts as a sub-grantee. Each local coordinator is responsible for community outreach,

recruiting families to house youth for up to 15 days, and attempting to reunite families. Mr. Glick also provided the Committee brochures on Host Homes (Exhibit 2).

Mr. Glick next discussed the Safe Place program, which encourages businesses to train employees to refer homeless youth to Safe Place providers. The Safe Place providers provide homeless youth access to crisis assistance, counseling, and shelter. Mr. Glick provided the Committee with additional written information concerning Safe Place (Exhibit 3).

Mr. Glick also discussed problems that homeless youth may encounter after they have been accepted into a college. Mr. Glick described the situation of a young man who had a 4.0 grade point average in high school and attended Indiana University for one semester. Because the student's parents refused to fill out some financial aid forms, the student was not allowed to return to IU.

Rep. Avery asked Mr. Glick if emancipation could help homeless youth. Mr. Glick responded that emancipation is difficult for homeless youth to achieve.

Rep. Avery next asked why the Host Homes program is not in urban counties. Mr. Glick answered that counties usually have shelters for homeless youth and rural counties do not have shelters for homeless youth.

Senator Skinner asked Mr. Glick if there are programs that assist homeless youth to transition to college. Mr. Glick stated that the federal McKinney Vento laws require liaisons in high schools to provide assistance.

Jim Killen, Bonnie Stryker, Elizabeth Malone and Ron Thompson, Indiana Youth Services Organization

Jim Killen, who represents 34 youth bureaus throughout Indiana, explained the Youth Service Bureaus have statutory duties to prevent juveniles from becoming delinquent and to keep youth out of the juvenile delinquency system. Mr. Killen also reminded the committee that at the last Committee's meeting testimony was presented that there are 10,000 homeless youth in Indiana.

Mr. Killen told the Committee that there are seven federally funded Basic Centers in Indiana that address the needs of runaway and homeless youth. The total federal funding for these centers is \$908,000. There are no state funds available for shelters serving homeless youth in Indiana, while other states invest heavily in funding these shelters. (Mr. Killen's statements are attached as Exhibit 4.)

Rep. Walorski asked Mr. Killen if it is the Department of Child Service's responsibility to take care of unattached youth. Mr. Killen answered that the Department of Child Services will only get involved if there is an allegation of abuse or neglect.

Bonnie Stryker, the Executive Director of the Youth Service Bureau in St. Joseph County, discussed her experiences with homeless and runaway youth. She explained that in the 1970s her program received referrals concerning runaway youth and was able to secure funding from the Homeless Youth Act Basic Center program. Last year, there were 773 reported runaways in St. Joseph County, but generally only 50% of homeless youth are reported. From 2005 to 2007, there was a 500% increase in the number of 18 year olds that her program housed. Ms. Stryker explained that youth run away from their families for a variety of reasons, including abuse, neglect, substance abuse, self identification as homosexual, or being discharged from the home. (Ms. Stryker's statements are attached as Exhibit 5.)

Ms. Strycker suggested that the Committee propose the following legislation:

- (1) Expand Project Safe Place.
- (2) Expand centers for runaway youth.
- (3) Provide funding to providers.
- (4) Minimize the criminalization of status offenses.
- (5) Extend the time period that a shelter must obtain parental permission to provide services to a minor from 24 hours to 72 hours.

Elizabeth Malone, the executive director of Stopover, a Youth Service Bureau in Marion County, discussed homeless youth in Marion County. She stated that there is a continuation of services for homeless youth in Marion County. Ms. Malone offered the following legislative suggestions for the Committee to consider:

- (1) Expand Safe Place programs throughout the state.
- (2) Provide transitional living services to homeless youth.
- (3) Allow youth to access services without parental permission.

Ms. Malone also stated that unattached youth are supposed to be reported to the Department of Child Services and schools are supposed to count homeless youth within their schools. (Ms. Malone's statements are attached as Exhibit 6.)

Ron Thompson, the Executive Director of the Youth Services Bureau of Monroe County, next spoke to the Committee about his bureau. Mr. Thompson stated that the emergency youth shelter he operates had 407 intakes in 2006. Mr. Thompson suggested that the Committee consider legislation to extend the time period within which a shelter must contact a parent of a runaway from 24 hours to 72 hours. Mr. Thompson also offered his written comments to the Committee (Exhibit 7).

Duane Wade, Children's Bureau

Duane Wade of the Children's Bureau next spoke to the Committee about the Family Support Center, an emergency shelter in Indianapolis that can house individuals that many shelters will not house, including newborns and youth up to 17 years of age. In 2006, the Family Support Center served 869 children and 481 families.

Other business

Representative Avery stated that the Committee will meet on October 2, 2007 and October 16, 2007. The location of the October 2, 2007 meeting has not been determined yet and the October 16, 2007 meeting will take place at the State House at 1:00 P.M.